WE CLAIM

1. A seat belt retractor assembly comprising:

a reel for a seat belt;

a seat belt retractor for generating a retraction force to rewind the seat belt on said reel;

a coupling device for selectively coupling and decoupling said retractor to said reel; and

a tensioning device for generating a tensioning force in the seat belt when in an active state, said coupling device decoupling said retractor from said reel when said tensioning device is in said active state.

2. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 1 wherein said retractor has a retraction force-reducing device, said retraction force-reducing device for reducing the retraction force on the seat belt from said retractor.

3. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 2 wherein said retraction force-reducing device is linked to said reel by a line.

4. The seat belt retraction assembly of Claim 2 wherein said retraction force-reducing device variably reduces the retraction force.

5. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 1 wherein said coupling device comprises a clutch for selectively coupling and decoupling said retractor from said reel.

6. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 5 wherein said clutch comprises a first clutch plate for selectively engaging a second clutch plate, said first clutch plate linked to said retractor and said second clutch plate linked to said reel.

7. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 6 including a spring for biasing said first clutch plate into contact with said second clutch plate.

8. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 5 wherein said clutch comprises an overrunning clutch, said clutch for decoupling said retractor from said reel when a first speed of said reel exceeds a second speed of said retractor.

9. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 8 wherein said overrunning clutch comprises a first clutch plate and a second clutch plate, said first clutch plate having teeth and said second clutch plate having grooves to receive said teeth, said teeth decoupling from said grooves when said first speed exceeds said second speed.

10. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 9 including a spring for biasing said first clutch plate into contact with said second clutch plate.

11. A seat belt retractor assembly comprising:

a reel for a seat belt;

a seat belt retractor for generating a retraction force to rewind the seat belt on said reel;

a retraction force-reducing device for reducing the retraction force of said seat belt retractor, said retraction force-reducing device linked to said retractor;

a clutch for selectively coupling and decoupling said retractor to said reel; and

a tensioning device for generating a tensioning force in the seat belt when in an active state, said clutch decoupling said retractor from said reel when said tensioning device is in said active state.

12. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 11 wherein said retraction force-reducing device links said retractor to said reel by a line.

13. The seat belt retraction assembly of Claim 11 wherein said retraction force- reducing device variably reduces the retraction force.

14. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 11 wherein said clutch comprises a first clutch plate for selectively engaging a second clutch plate, said first clutch plate linked to said retractor and said second clutch plate linked to said reel.

15. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 14 including a spring for biasing said first clutch plate into contact with said second clutch plate.

16. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 11 wherein said clutch comprises an overrunning clutch, said clutch for decoupling said retractor from said reel when a first speed of said reel exceeds a second speed of said retractor.

17. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 16 wherein said overrunning clutch comprises a first clutch plate and a second clutch plate, said first clutch plate having teeth and said second clutch plate having grooves to receive said teeth, said teeth decoupling from said grooves when said first speed exceeds said second speed.

18. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 17 including a spring for biasing said first clutch plate into contact with said second clutch plate.

19. The seat belt retractor assembly of Claim 11 wherein said clutch is linked to said reel and said retraction force-reducing device.

20. A method for controlling retraction of a seat belt, comprising the steps of:

coupling a seat belt retractor to a seat belt, the seat belt retractor for generating a retraction force on the seat belt;

coupling a tensioning device to the seat belt, the tensioning device for generating a tensioning force on the seat belt; and

decoupling the seat belt retractor from the seat belt when the tensioning device generates the tensioning force on the seat belt.